

1790 Census and Apportionment - Analyzing the Three-Fifths Compromise

Description:

In this activity, students use the results of the original 1790 Census to analyze the effect that the Three-Fifths Compromise had on the apportionment of the United States House of Representatives. Students calculate the effect that three different scenarios – (1) total population (2) free only and (3) Three-Fifths Compromise – would have had on the allocation of regional power within the House of Representatives.

Standard:

Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s) Standard 3: The institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how they were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights

Materials:

Basic calculator

Population by State, Original 1790 Census				
	<i>State Name</i>	<i>Free Population</i>	<i>Slave Population</i>	<i>Total Population</i>
North	Vermont	85,523	16	85,539
	New Hampshire	141,727	158	141,885
	Maine	96,540	0	96,540
	Massachusetts	378,787	0	378,787
	Rhode Island	67,877	948	68,825
	Connecticut	235,182	2,764	237,946
	New York	318,796	21,324	340,120
	New Jersey	172,716	11,423	184,139
	Pennsylvania	430,636	3,737	434,373
	Total	1,927,784	40,370	1,968,154
South	Delaware	50,209	8,887	59,096
	Maryland	216,692	103,036	319,728
	Virginia	454,983	292,627	747,610
	Kentucky	61,247	12,430	73,677
	North Carolina	293,179	100,572	393,751
	South Carolina	141,979	107,094	249,073
	Georgia	53,284	29,264	82,548
	Total	1,271,573	653,910	1,925,483
	National Totals	3,199,357	694,280	3,893,637

Activity Instructions for Students

The Constitutional Convention was held in 1787 with the goal of addressing governing problems as a result of weaknesses inherent in the Articles of Confederation (ratified in 1777). Regarding representation

in the Congress of the Confederation, the Articles of Confederation had conferred each state with one vote, regardless of land area or population. With the ratification of the United States Constitution at the culmination of the Constitutional Convention in September 1787, the apportionment issue was ultimately resolved by calling for apportionment according to states' population.

In this activity, you will use the results of the original 1790 Census to analyze the effect that the Three-Fifths Compromise had on the apportionment of the United States House of Representatives. After examining the original results as well as a simplified table of the results, you will review the original results, examine a summarized table of those results, and calculate the effect that three different enumeration scenarios – (1) total population (2) free only and (3) Three-Fifths Compromise – would have had on how the population was aggregated. Finally, you will discuss the implications that each of the enumeration scenarios would have had on the distribution of seats in the House of Representatives.

Note: Printed and written English in 1790 had a character that looked like a lower case "f" that was used as lower case "s".

Activity Assessment

Population Tallies			
	<i>Scenario 1 (free and slaves)</i>	<i>Scenario 2 (free only)</i>	<i>Scenario 3 (free plus 3/5 slaves)</i>
North	1,968,154	1,927,784	1,952,006
South	1,925,483	1,271,573	1,663,919
Total Country	3,893,637	3,199,357	3,615,925

Percentage of National Population			
	<i>Scenario 1 (free and slaves)</i>	<i>Scenario 2 (free only)</i>	<i>Scenario 3 (free plus 3/5 slaves)</i>
North	$\frac{1,968,154}{3,893,637} \times 100 = 51\%$	60%	54%
South	49%	40%	46%

1. What role did the original 1790 census play in addressing weaknesses of apportionment under the articles of Confederation?

Under the Articles of Confederation, each state was allotted one vote, regardless of its population. The 1790 census provided population counts, which gave Congress the ability to apportion seats in the House of Representatives according to the guidelines laid out in the US Constitution.

2. Using the results from your completed table in Part 3, discuss possible implications for apportioning seats in the US House of Representatives if the 1790 enumeration had been carried out as described in each of the three scenarios.

Using Scenario 1 (counting free people and slaves) to conduct the 1790 enumeration would have resulted in a population where 51% of the population lived in the North and 49% in the South, or roughly equal populations. However, using Scenario 2 to conduct the original enumeration would have resulted in a count with a significantly higher population in the North. The Three-Fifths Compromise (Scenario 3) was the option ultimately laid out in the Constitution. Using this scenario, the count resulted in a distribution of population with 54% in the North and 46% in the South.

Teacher's Notes

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to read and interpret a summarized data table of the original 1790 Census results.
- Students will be able to perform calculations to determine how representation in the North and South would have differed given three different apportionment scenarios.
- Students will be able to analyze the effect that the Three-Fifths Compromise had on the apportionment of the US House of Representatives.
- Students will be able to explain how the Founders determined representation and why they came to the Three-Fifths Compromise.

Blooms Taxonomy

Analyzing

Instructions for Teachers

Before this Activity

Review or explain the broad political and economic themes of the early post-Revolution United States, particularly as they relate to the differences between the Northern and Southern regions.

Review or explain the efforts of the representatives to the Constitutional Convention to address the weaknesses of apportionment under the Articles of Confederation.

Review or explain the major points related to the Three-Fifths Compromise. Be sure to highlight that the Three-Fifths Compromise was reached during the Constitutional Convention of 1787, three years before the original census was conducted in 1790.

Explain that the Constitution set the number of Representatives at 65 from 1787 until the first enumeration in 1790. The first apportionment, based on the 1790 census, resulted in 105 members.

During this Activity

Have students examine and discuss the results of the 1790 Census.

Have students work individually or in groups to complete the worksheet provided with this activity.

In Part 1 of the activity, students review a table that shows the results from the original 1790 Census. This table summarizes the original groups into only free people and slaves.

In Part 2 of the activity, students determine population totals according to the three different scenarios defined in the activity. Scenario 1 is the population if all people (free people and slaves) were used in the count. Scenario 2 is the population if only free people were used in the count. Scenario 3 represents the Three-Fifths Compromise.

If needed, remind students that to determine the population totals for Scenario 3, they should multiply the slave population by $\frac{3}{5}$ or 0.6 and add that number to the free population.

In Part 3 of the activity, students calculate the percentage of the House of Representatives that each region would have controlled, assuming each of the three scenarios presented.

After this Activity

Review students' calculations and responses on their worksheet.

Facilitate students' discussion of the questions provided at the end of the worksheet or others that you provide.

Additional Information

The main graph used in this activity is a replication of the 1790 Original Census Schedule. Please click [here](#) to find this resource.